Lofthouse Letters

EDITORIAL NOTE

These letters of Martha (Patty) Lofthouse form part of a small collection of Lofthouse letters in the possession of a descendant in England, Mr Neil Lofthouse. In addition to these there is Martha's diary written aboard the *Haidee* in 1850, two letters written by William Boast (5 Oct. 1850 and 5 Jan. 1851) and a letter to Natal from a relation, Emma Lofthouse in Yorkshire (7 Sep. 1850)

The Lofthouse family was well represented on the *Haidee*. Besides Martha, there was her husband Benjamin, his brother John and sister Hannah with her husband William Boast. Benjamin died in Natal on 28 Jan. 1852 (according to the Lofthouse family Bible he was drowned) and Martha and their two sons left Natal for Port Elizabeth in December of that year. At the end of her *Haidee* diary the following sentences have been added 'Left Port Elizabeth on 19 Dec. 1853 by the *Alexandrina* Captain Norris. Saw the Lizzard light on my road home on 16th of Feby. 1854'. Family tradition has it that Martha remarried and left her two children with the Lofthouse family. Mr Neil Lofthouse is the grandson of the younger one Benjamin.

The emigration scheme under which the Lofthouses and the Boasts came to Natal was a co-operative one initiated by William's cousin Henry Boast (1816 - 1850). Henry was a prominent Wesleyan preacher and the scheme was primarily directed at Wesleyans. Recruiting was undertaken mainly in the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire. Two members of the organizing committee, William Lund and James Tutin, went to Natal ahead of the party to choose and purchase land, while Henry Boast chartered the *Pallas* from the shipowner Joseph Rylands. On inspection the agent of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners declared the *Pallas* unseaworthy. By this time 230 prospective emigrants had converged on Hull to meet the sailing date of 3 Apr. 1850. Rylands was at first unwilling to produce another vessel but finally the *Haidee*, due to sail for Bombay, was substituted. There were more delays and the *Haidee*, instead of sailing on 20th April, left only on 10th July. Besides the problems occasioned by the securing of a vessel, Boast also had the responsibility of caring for some of the emigrants who were quite without the means of supporting themselves during the long delay in Hull. When an action for redress was brought before the magistrates it was found that legally Boast not Rylands was liable for the subsistence expenses of all the emigrants. Boast's anxieties led to his mental break-down, and then his death six weeks before the *Haidee* finally sailed. Mrs Boast took over her husband's responsibilities and kept the party together until the *Haidee* was able to sail.

There were even more Boasts on board than Lofthouses. Besides Mrs Henry Boast and her three children, there was Henry's sister Marianne and her husband George Potter, his three cousins Henry, David and Dr Charles Bird Boast, and of course William and his wife Hannah.

In addition to the Lofthouse/Boast papers' importance in giving an insight into the everyday doings and difficulties of the ordinary Natal immigrant, they have a further significance in that they suggest that all was not straightforward with the Yorkshire immigration scheme. Up to now the general impression has been that it was a well-intentioned scheme devised for the good of its participants — and possibly it would have remained that way had Boast lived.

Another revelation is the attitude of Mrs Boast's father Joseph Smith — until now he has been considered her mainstay in her troubles. One of William Boast's letters presents a different picture — Smith harrassing his daughter and threatening to sell her up if what he had put into the scheme was not paid back. William Boast sums it up thus: 'in fact she has a time almost like a dog with him'.

Another concept which is upset by these letters — or at least left open to query — is the amount of involvement of Benjamin Lofthouse with the scheme. Professor Hattersley in his *British settlement of Natal* names him with Lund and Tutin as Henry Boast's principal associates and states he and others went touring the country interviewing would-be immigrants. There is nothing in Martha or William Boast's letters to suggest he had anything to do with the committee. However one could argue the Martha's dislike of 'the committee, the honourable committee' might be explained by disagreement between them and her husband. According to the son of one of its members, William Smith, the committee consisted of his father Robert

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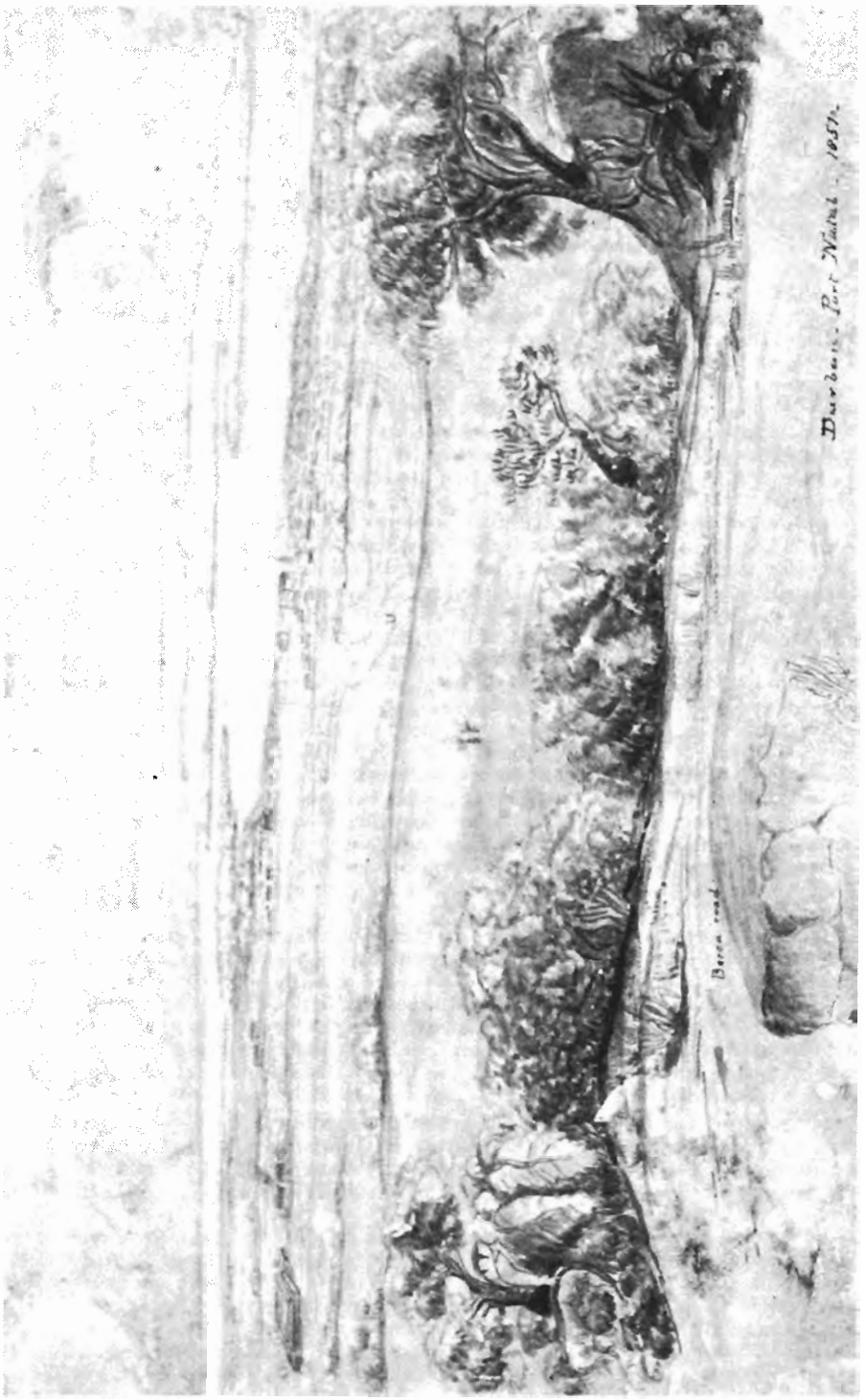

Barbados. Port Wards 1850
Bara road

Smith, Henry Boast as Chairman, Lund, Tutin, Richard Brough, Samuel Cordukes/Cordeaux and Joseph Smith — i.e. no mention of Lofthouse.

Copies of these letters and the diary were sent by Mr Lofthouse to Mr and Mrs W. Thomson of Charleen, Roberts Road, Pietermaritzburg. He has since kindly given permission for their publication. The Thomsons met Mr Lofthouse while staying with their daughter in England. When he heard they came from Pietermaritzburg he showed them the letters and the diary and asked them to try to trace information in Natal on his great-grandfather, or on the Lofthouse family generally. Should any Lofthouse descendants know anything about the family, Mr Lofthouse would be interested. It is known that Benjamin's brother John eventually settled in Pietermaritzburg and had at least eight children. One daughter married Gilbert Stace Phipson (1862 — 1931), son of Thomas Phipson. William and Hannah Boast remained in Durban. Besides the baby that died on the *Haidee* they had at least six other children. Their eldest daughter married in Durban William Henry Whyte (died 1916). Mr Lofthouse's address is: c/o National Westminster Bank, 37 High Street, Wootton Bassett, Swindon, Wilts.

Martha Lofthouse's original spelling and grammar have been retained in the letters which follow.

SHELAGH SPENCER

LETTER I

Anchored in Port Natal Bay
Haidee Monday 7th October

My dear Uncle

We are here at last after many ups & downs. We have lost poor Enoch Welburn[1] of a fever, the only case on board, had one case of small pox but the man recovered. Mrs Briton died but she was more like it when she came on board than living for she was one of those that thought that Port Natal would bring dead people to life again or at least her husband[2] was, and 3 or 4 infants. Mrs Walker[3] was confined and child dead, Mrs Potter[4] ditto and Mrs W. Boast ditto all sons & a little boy two and a half years old. I have been very poorly a great part of the voyage very much troubled with sea sickness but rather better since we got near the Cape.

Sunday 10th November

My dear Uncle I have now found time and opportunity to write again. We landed on wednesday the 9th October and were about a fortnight before we got all belonging the tent. We were staying with Mr & Mrs Laburn[5] in one they had borrowed for they could not get theirs from the ship. We got our tent up on the 25th and then John and Benjamin started the next morning for Pietermaritzburgh to buy some Oxen to take the luggage up the country it being the cheapest plan as they want Oxen, and they charge so much for waggons do the Dutch. Then they could not go before for they had to stay to look after the goods for the ship's company were so long of unloading the ship & so careless that half the things belonging to a many people were wasted a part of our largest plough was lost overboard into the sea so one plough is of no use for a new part will cost as much as a new one altogether.

Durban from the Berea ridge, 1851.

Photograph of a watercolour in the W.J. Irons papers, Natal Society Library.

It would have been much better if they had brought nothing or at least next to nothing with them for all that is wanted in the farming line at Natal can be had hear quite as cheap as in England close and everything that is required. The less people bring the less they have to waste and to trouble about. They have bought 18 Oxen, 6 that have been drawn, 6 ready for use & 6 young ones. The land is not half ready and I do not know when it will.

They are obliged to get the village land allotted for there are so many poor people that they do not know what to do with but get them settled down somewhere but the larger allotments will be long enough before they get settled al out and when they are, the committee, I have no doubt, will have the best share for there is a great deal of rogishness about it. The committee want to make us pay 35 or 40 per cent for the expenses of the concern all together that will amount to between 30 and 40£ & 10£ or more for extra luggage something more for landing and something after that for land surveying and what more I cannot tell you, but there is no end to the ways they have to get peoples money from them as yet all as been going out, when the coming in is to begin I do not know, but a load is to start for the Haidee Village tomorrow if all is well. It is a week's work to go there and back and we have 4 or 5 load so that it will be some time before we get settled down with all our things around us & then when the land gets allotted we shall have to move again, onto that, so it will be nothing but moving for some time yet. It certainly is a very fine country, and after a time there may be a living made in the farming line but there is no market for wheat or any kind of corn at present feeding Oxen seems all that can be done but Mealeys & Oats grown and cut green and made into hay, and a few vegetables are all that are grown but it is to be hoped we shall soon be able to grow our own corn but their is only one mill in the Colony. Mr Allison[6] had sent some wheat to grind and it was 4 months before he got it back so if it is 6 months of growing and 4 of getting ground it will be some time before we have any of our own flour. I do not much like D'urban for I have never been well since I landed and the people say that it is from the badness of the water but I do not think it at all healthy. It is very low and marshy in many places and abounds with all kinds of water vermin, and the dry land and trees abound with toads and Frogs the most beautiful little frogs that you can imagine all colours of the rainbow but the toads are very large and there are all kinds of insects both flying and creaping but of all the most disagreable are an insect called ticks they are not quite like the ticks in England they are between a bug and a sheeps louse but they fasten into ones skin and they are past pulling out and the larger ones will make very bad places and lame a great many. I have had a many on me but always got them off well. They make large black places on me like bruises but if their heads are left in when they are pulled of they make what is called a Natal sore and very bad it is I understand but as I was saying I had not been well I have had the diareiha ever since I landed and a sore mouth and nothing does me any good and the Sunday after we got the tent up John and Ben had gone up the country and our man[7] was gone out for a walk and a port Natal wind arose in a moment and was carrying our tent away. There was but two stakes that was not secure & the wind just came out of that quarter and Mrs Welburn and me had to hold with all our might, Mr Dunning[8] had come to help us and just when they had begun, their tent was off completely so of they ran.

After sometime Mr Bentley [9] came to our assistance but I had then held to long the poor tent accomplished what sea sickness nor anything could do before. I was never well after but did not get confined till Thursday the 31st of October a seven months child. The Dr thought it would not live but he had it in a warm bath and the poor little thing is alive yet a face about the size of a tea cup & would go into a quart pot and sleeps day and night but when it is dressed and fed so it is not a deal of trouble. Mrs Welbourn says she is sure there is an appointed time for all to die or me and the Baby would both have gone this week, but I have got wonderfully better and can sit up and get about already but am very weak, for I had not gained much strength before in the room of that I lost by sea sickness.

January 7th

My dear Uncle I hope now to finish and get it sent. I hope you have spent a merry Christmas and trust this a new year will be all you can wish. I should have written sooner but we are yet just in the same unsettled state that we were at Hull. The town land is ready but we do not know that anything else is. One load of our luggage is gone to the new town of York but I say Yorkshire Humbug. We are still in the tent at Durban and they make a little with their cart and Oxen. They have brought a brick yard here but it will be a little time before they make much of it but in time I think it will pay very well so Ben and I will go to the land and John will stay here. Mr and Mrs Laburn have gone to some land about 4 miles of us so Mrs L came and spent 3 days with me at Christmas we had Firmity & Roast Beef & Plumb Pudding good old Yorkshire fare. The Beef is much better than I expected to find it. We had Mr Nickelson[10] spending the day with us yesterday, he speaks very highly of the place altogether he says the land is much better than he expected to find it. I do not know for I have been no further than D'Urban yet and there is little else but sand and Rushes & Bush that I have seen and my idea of the place altogether if people would do and live in England as they have to do when they get here they would make nearly as good a living and not work much harder. The climate certainly is beautiful and agrees with me very well for I am getting fat. I shall soon be like the Dutch ladies if I go on at the rate I am doing and things will live for my little boy grows the most suprisingly. He has deceived all that have seen him but none more than me. He is quite a fine little fellow I should be sorry to lose him for he is nice company for me or at least something to spend my time with. Mr Lund[11] another of our managing men has falen from his horse and broken his leg in two places a fortnight since but is doing well. It has rather delayed the land business. I wish it was settled and we were up at the land for there are so many nasty vermin here and there is none up the country we shall try to get soon now there are some been there some time but did not know their own land so of course could not build any houses and could do little or nothing but shoot Bucks and they are scarce and very shy fed(?). Powder and shot expensive. I hope I shall be able to tell you what I think of York when I write again. I do not think much of this place, fruit is very scarce. I have not time to write London. Perhaps you will let them know how I am and give my best love to all Friends. Hoping you are all well, write soon & direct for me at the Post office Pietermaritzburgh for we shall be gone up the country before it can reach us. We shall be sure to get it if it

only gets to Port Natal. Give my best love to my dear Grand-mother and all Friends. I remain My dear Uncle your affectionate Niece Patty. I am going to write to Burn Butts (?). I have not heard or seen anything of young Otterburn[12] yet and tell Mr & Mrs Grainger all the particulars of this, for I have not time to write to them now. I did not know untill tonight that Mr Tutin[13] was going to leave for England and he wants all letters by seven in the morning but I will write to Mrs Grainger soon. Give our best love.

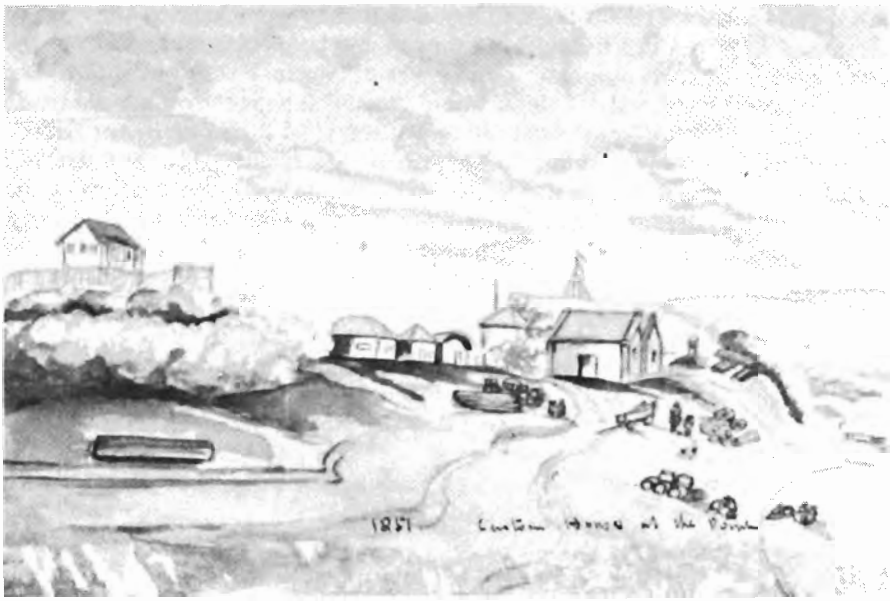
January 7th 1851

LETTER II

Durban August 19th 1851

My dear Aunt

I begin to think we are forgotten by all our English Friends. I have never heard from one but Emma Lofthouse since we left our native land. I can now tell you something of the land we live in, I can safely say that it will grow anything that will grow in England and a great many things that England cannot produce, there was some potatoes shown at the show[1] on the first of this month, the third crop of the same piece of land since October 5th 1850 very nice ones indeed. They were not quite so large as those that got the prize but as large as the general English potatoes, they were sweet potatoes as large as any one had and something they call Yams, they are a sort of potatoe. They eat them to meat and some very large turnips and Carrots and everthing that grows in England in the vegetable line as well as African productions. All the things that were shown were grown near D'Urban, but the land up the country will grow anything to much greater perfection than near the sea. I do not think wheat will grow near here nor think that it has been tried but I have seen some samples that has grown near to York but I think the York Hills[2] have not tried it there yet but I expect it will not be long before they do. We are not gone to the great town of York yet and I do not know when we shall. The committee The honourable committee have given us 100 acres of land for our 100£, that is they have charged us 1£ an acre for land that they bought for 2s an acre after we landed. They have robbed everyone out of all that they possibly could and now to crown all old Smith[3] of Market Weighton has robed them out of there draw backs and it nips them very hard, but then robing other people is quite another thing, in there consideration my advice is come to natal or go to any other colony in the world but have nothing to do with the methodists, they are the worst set you can deal with. There is not one in 100 that does not put there religion on for a cloak to lead honest people by the nose and get all they can out of them. I am rather affraid Old Smith has done what will transport him and it will be a sad affair at his time of life. I must not forget to tell you that they have turned Richard brough[4] out of the committee. The reason I do not know unless it is because he is not a religious young man but I should think you have heard all about it from his friends before now. I can now say we are very comfortable and been some time in a nice little house. Ben built it himself. We have a nice sitting room



The Customs House of Port Natal, 1851.

Photograph of a watercolour in the W.J. Irons papers, Natal Society Library.

and two bedrooms so you see we have not forgot to provide for a friend and been at a brick yard I need scarcely tell you that we have a nice brick fireplace and our oven set. It was a very lucky chance that I married a man that had ingenuity to build a house for if he could not I do not know what we should have done before now. He thought it would take up too much time to make doors and windows he could be making more money other ways and perhaps get them maid better. They have been to come 3 months since and were ordered some time before that so we offer up calico as a substitute and we are quite near to the bush that was no longer than last year that an Elephant was seen at the brick yards for warter but we have seen nothing of any wild animals. We had the impression of a Tigers foot left in some bricks some time since and we see monkeys sometimes but not often and they are quite harmless. Game is rather scarce, Bucks, guinea fowls and wild Turkeys and partridges are what is most general. Some time since there were some nice birds they call Odedoes[5] here. Ben shot in many of them. They were very much like goos — but not so large — when they were stuffed with sage and onions and they made very good pies but the season was soon over for them. We have not seen any lately. The birds here are some of the most beautiful you can imagine — all colours and some very curious looking but few or none that I hear are in any way musical. Warter Wagtails are very tame and come to the door to pick crumbs. Robins I have never seen but plenty of swallows. John and Ben have got divided all but the Brick yard and I do not know when they will get that done for John will neither sell his half nor buy Ben's so there as no dealing with such a customer as that. I am sorry to say we have been very unlucky with our Oxen — we have lost somewhere betwixt 30 & 40. There is only one sort that will live at the Bay and they are generally to small for work, good ones of that sort are very bad to meet with. Sheep will not live near D'urban long

but they live very well up the country and if they were kept as they are in England I have not much doubt but they would be as plentiful and as good. They have in general one lamb at a time and two in a year but if they had plenty of good Rape which I think would grow well hear they might be made to produce 4 or more in the same time. Mutton is 6d lb. Some of our friends in England think a leg of mutton a rare thing on our table. We are not particular to a leg I can assure you. We generally cook the yonkey as the caffers call the whole at least when we can get a nice lamb which I think rather better than mutton. Pork is 6d lb, Beef 2d 2½ for the best pieces and not half so tough as was given account of, fowls Ducks & Geese very scarce, eggs 1½ each at 1s4d to 1s6d a lb, fruit is very scarce, and any thing will grow but there are very few things planted and not many to be had in the colony. I should like if any one was coming to Natal that you knew of at the time of year if you could without much trouble or expense send me two or 3 red apples from the moor for I should like some apple trees. I think they would grow well here, pineapples grow well hear. I must not forget to say we have some very large botanical gardens begun here, they are about 10 minutes walk from our house. It was their that the ploughing match and Horticultural show was held on the 1st of this month. You would have been quite surprized to see, as my Uncle used to say, the living Tulips and roses that were their. I can assure you I have seen no better attendance at some places in England, we shall have young England hear after a little more time gets over. Clothing generally is nearly has cheap has it is in England, Tea, Coffee Sugar and those sort of things are much the same has you have them. Ale and porter are rather dearer but spirits are much cheaper than you have them. Wood is cheap enough but Iron work is very dear. If you know any one that is likely to come out hear you may tell them they may bring good waggon or cart wheels and axeltrees. Bodys are made hear to suit the place better than in England at least. Waggons, Ploughs & arrows are at a discount, nails & those sort of things are very useful and wanted. After that money is the most useful article they can bring. We sell Bricks burnt 32s delivered for 1 000. There are a good many brick houses at D'urban now. As many letters that go from hear are sent back again in the paper I beg that you will not publish this or let it go out of your possession for any one else to do so for we do not wish to be the means of bringing any one from their native land here, for people coming with out money has no chance to do anything and people with money must lay it out in a careful way and work hard into the bargen and they will find it the same go where they will. Please to read the inclosed and sent it to my Father, I do not know where to direct to him. Ben joins me in kind love to you my dear Aunt and all my cousins as well as all friends. Tell Mrs Holtby I got my set of tea things she so kindly gave me landed without one been broke and they are quite a new pattern here. Give my best love to all my Aunts & Uncles also my dear Grandmother and tell her if she was at Port Natal without the trouble of the voyage she would like it very much.

It is a most beautiful climate.

I remain my dear Aunt your
Affectionate niece

Patty Lofthouse.

Durban 26th August

Mr H. Dunning came to see us from Pietermaritzburgh yesterday and has returned today so we see some of our old friends and ship mates when they come to D'urban on business but visiting days at Natal are rather in their youth yet. Mr F. Dunning has gone this week to Australia with Mr Green[6], a Surveyor. I must not forget to tell you that I like Port Natal very well better than I expected I should, but there is not the money to be made that was represented though any one that will work may get a good living, but that can be done in England. I can assure you a Colonial life is not without its Ruffs but the ship fits you for anything. If we came by train we should take badly to it. Mr Dunning desires to be remembered to all friends.

Adieu.

NOTES

Letter I

[1] Enoch Welburn came from Beverley, Yorks. and was servant to the Lofthouses. Possibly, as was sometimes the case, the Lofthouses paid his and his wife Mary's and son Robert's fares in return for a certain period of service in Natal.
[2] James Brittain (died 1863), a joiner from Bridlington, Yorks. He was afterwards Poundmaster, Ward 1, Durban County.
[3] Esther, wife of John Walker. The Walkers came from Wetwang near Driffield, Yorks. They went to Australia in 1852.
[4] Marianne (born Boast).
[5] Charles and Eliza Labron from York where Charles had been a tobacco manufacturer.
[6] Allison — there are no Allisons on the *Haidee* passenger list but there were two Allerstons, Alfred and William Francis, young men from Bridlington.
[7] 'our man' — possibly Robert Welburn.
[8] The Dunnings — Henry and Francis from Great Driffield, Yorks. Henry later in 1850 established a general dealer's business, Yorkshire House, in Pietermaritzburg. Francis went to Australia.
[9] Mr Bentley — George Bentley from Hull, formerly of Helmsley, Yorks. The Bentleys were one of the *Haidee* families that went farming at York.
[10] Nicholson — presumably either William or John Duggleby Nicholson who settled near Richmond. They and their families had arrived in July 1850 on the *Sandwich*. Both had been born at Watton, East Riding.
[11] William Lund.
[12] Presumably Richard Otterbourne (born *c.* 1822) who emigrated to Natal on the *Lady Bruce*, arriving in May 1850.
[13] James Tutin.

Letter II

[1] the Natal Agricultural and Horticultural Society's show.
[2] York Hills — possibly a reference to *Haidee* passengers John Barnby Hill and his father-in-law Charles Claybourn who appear initially to have farmed at York. In later years they purchased erf 33 Boom Street on which stands Pietermaritzburg's oldest house. The adjoining Claybourn Street is a reminder of this. J. B. Hill and family were the only Hills to come on the *Haidee*.
[3] Joseph Smith.
[4] Richard Brough.
[5] ? Hadadas or green Ibis.
[6] William Green came to Natal in 1849 via the Cape where he had previously been admitted as a land surveyor. Green and his family left for Australia via Mauritius in October 1851 on the *Cheshire Witch*.